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ABSTRACT

The concept of social role range (SRR) deals with the magnitude of an individual's repertoire of different interpersonal behavior patterns and exhibits the properties of a personality trait. Over a broad range of interpersonal settings, individuals tend to be consistent in the magnitude of their SRR's. A role play technique was devised for measuring SRR, in which subjects performed in a variety of ways in four role play situations. To examine the relation of SRR to certain standard personality variables as assessed by the Adjective Checklist and the Comrey Personality Inventory, two studies using college students as research subjects were conducted. Results indicated that SRR was related to lability, affiliation, interpersonal trust, and other variables. (JAC)

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Personality Correlates of Social Role Range[1]

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Personality Correlates of Social Role Range

The aims of this paper are threefold: first, to propose and delineate the concept of social role range; second, to describe a method developed for the measurement of this variable; and third, to report two studies investigating some of the personality correlates of social role range.

We will begin with a discussion of the theoretical background and rationale for the concept of social role range. The general domain in which the concept is relevant is that of interpersonal behavior, i.e., behavior in which one person, A, is interacting with another person, B. Now, in some interpersonal situations person A's behavior with respect to person B is primarily rule-determined--that is to say, it is determined mainly by the constraints of the setting. Thus, if you meet an acquaintance who says "Good morning" to you, you are essentially compelled by the nature of the setting to give a greeting in return. Certain other kinds of interpersonal situations, however, are much less constraining--i.e., they permit person A a range of options from which to select a given behavior. Situations of this latter type are more interesting, psychologically, than situations that are completely rule-determined, and constitute the area of our research.

A specific individual can be conceptualized as having a given repertoire of possible behaviors for particular kinds of social situations. By repertoire we mean the total of the different interpersonal behavior patterns that the person has readily available, and from which a choice can be made as to what behavior to perform in a given kind of interpersonal

situation. We have termed the size of this repertoire as social role range, and we posit that individuals differ in their social role ranges, with some persons having broad ranges, some narrow ranges, and so on.

Inplied in the position just stated is the assumption that social role range--or SRR, as we may abbreviate it--has the properties of a personality trait--i.e., that over a broad scope of different kinds of interpersonal settings, individuals will tend to be consistent in the magnitude of their SRRs.

If we are correct in our basic theoretical rationale, and in our supposition that SRR constitutes, to a meaningful degree, a personality trait, then it would seem that SRR could be a highly useful variable in clinical, personality, and social psychology.

However, in order to use this variable, in either an applied or a theoretical setting, it is of course necessary to assess it. Accordingly, we will now describe the method that we devised for measuring SRR.

A roleplay technique was used. After considerable preliminary work, four roleplays were selected to comprise the test battery. In each roleplay there were two participants--the subject and an actor, who was one of the research staff. We will illustrate the procedure by describing the first roleplay. The subject is asked to imagine that he or she is entering a cleaning establishment ot pick up his suede coat. The subject then imagines that he notices a blemish on the coat, and complains to the manager--acted by one of the research team--about the blemish. The manager says that there is nothing that can be done. Up to this point, both the subject and the manager are reading from a script, but from then on the subject must improvise. Clearly, there are many ways that a person

can deal with this situation--he can complain bitterly, can accept blame, can threaten to take the problem to a lawyer, and so on. After the subject has handled the problem in a certain way the enactment is stopped, and the subject is invited to reenact the skit, with the provision that this time he is to handle the problem in a different way. After that enactment, the subject is invited to enact the situation in a still different way. And so on, until the subject indicates that he does not know of any other ways that he could deal with the interpersonal situation.

The subject's SRR score was the total number of different enactments for the four roleplays. Thus, if a subject enacted each of the four roleplays in two different ways her score would be 8; if she enacted one roleplay in three ways and the other three roleplays in two ways each, her score would be 9, and so on.

We will turn now to the two studies so far completed. The subjects in the first study were 32 college students, including 13 men and 19 women. The SRR scores--i.e., the total number of enactments for the four roleplays--ranged from a low of 4 to a high of 22, with a mean of 11.04--almost exactly 11. The means and standard deviations were almost identical for men and women.

It is clear, then, that our predictions that persons would vary among themselves on SRR was amply supported. The next question is: to what extent are we actually dealing here with a personality trait?--or, to put it differently, to what extent was a subject's role range in one skit consistent with her role range in another skit? This will be seen as the familiar problem, in a different context, of test reliability, in the sense of internal consistency. To examine this question we computed the split-

half reliability for SRR. The obtained coefficient, when appropriately corrected, was .85. This result indicates that our procedure for measuring SRR is highly reliable, and also supports the position that SRR tends to be a general trait.

The extent of generality of the trait of social role range must of course be delineated by further research. We should note here, however, that the question of the degree to which the role play behaviors were representative of real-life behaviors is not at issue here, since the role-plays were, as such, instances of the universe of interpersonal behaviors, and thus were samples of that universe in their own right.

In the study I have just summarized the subjects also completed the Gough Adjective Check List. This procedure was to enable us to gain some insight into the personality correlates of SRR--what is a high SRR person like? And conversely, what is a low SRR person like?

We scored the ACL for 8 scales that seemed, on a priori grounds, to possibly have some relationship to SRR. These scales, along with the obtained coefficients, are listed in Table 1. The three ACL scales that correlated significantly with SRR were No. Adjectives checked (.52), Lability (.62), and Affiliation (.38). Reference to the meaning of these scales in the ACL Manual indicates that high SRR individuals can be described as tending to see themselves as emotional, adventurous, enthusiastic, spontaneous, flexible, and assertive, and as seeking and sustaining numerous friendships. Low SRR scorers, in contrast, see themselves as quiet, reserved, cautious, conventional, unemotional, steady, and as less needful of friendships.

Our second study included 36 college students, comprised of 13 women

and 23 men. All subjects completed the Comrey Personality Inventory. Correlations between the Comrey Scales and SRR are reported in Table 1. Two of the seven scales scored (the M-F scale was omitted) yielded significant correlations with SRR, and a third approached significance. These results indicated that high SRR subjects were more trusting (.36), more able to empathize with others (.40), and slightly more extraverted (.30) than low SRR subjects.

An additional personality measure was obtained in the second study. Two judges independently rated each subject, on the basis of demographic data such as college major, vocational goal, and the like, as to the extent to which the subject was "people-oriented" vs. "object-oriented". Though the interrater reliability was only .68 (corrected) the correlation between the combined ratings and SRR was .37, significant at the .05 level, indicating that high SRR subjects are more "people-oriented" than low SRR subjects.

To conclude, we have proposed the concept of social role range, or SRR, and have obtained evidence that this variable functions as a personality trait. Further, certain personality characteristics of social role range have been identified.

References

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Table 1
Correlations Between SRR and
Personality Variables

Measure	N	Correlation
Adjective Check List (Study 1)		
No. Adjectives checked	32	.52**
Self Confidence	32	.16
Lability	32	.62**
Personal Adjustment	32	.20
Dominance	32	.17
Affiliation	32	.38*
Change	32	.19
Abasement	32	-.18
Comrey Personality Scales (Study 2)		
Trust	36	.36*
Orderliness	36	.13
Social Conformity	36	-.03
Activity	36	.25
Emotional Stability	36	.11
Extraversion	36	.30
Empathy	36	.40*
Rating Object vs. People Oriented (Study 2)	36	.37*

*Significant at .05 level (2-tail test)
**Significant at .01 level (2-tail test)